

Parent and Student Expectations of Highest Education Level

The High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) is a nationally representative, longitudinal study of over 23,000 9th graders in 2009. This study follows students throughout their secondary and postsecondary years assessing student trajectories, major fields of study, and career paths. The Base Year collection occurred in 2009, with a First Follow-up in 2012 and a Second Follow-up in 2016. The study included questions for both students and their parents about highest level of expected educational attainment.

How have parents' expectations for their children's education changed over time?

Parents were asked to select the highest level of education that they expected their child to complete.¹ Parents were first asked in 2009, when their child was

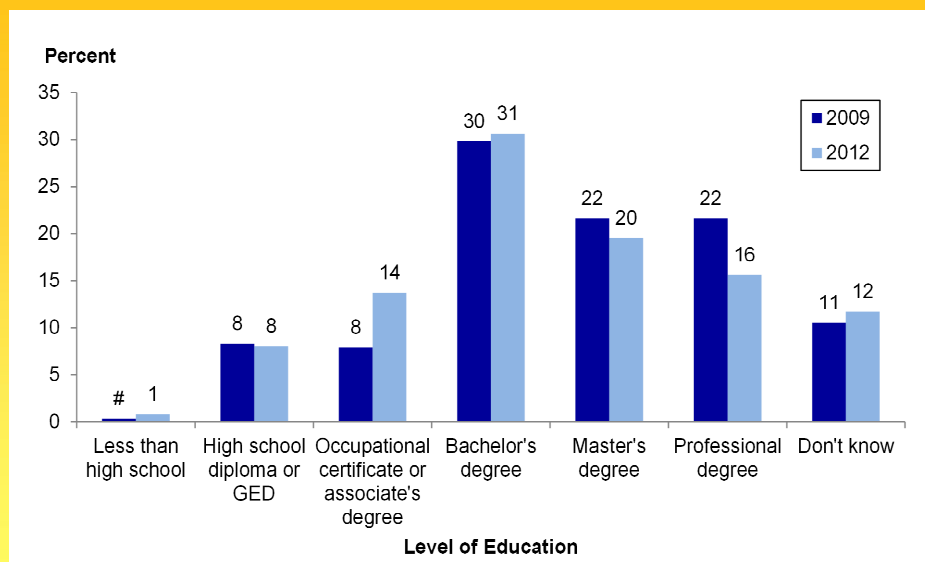
a student in the first semester of 9th grade. They were asked a second time in the spring of 2012, when the majority of the students in the cohort were in 11th grade.

- The percentage of parents who expected their child's highest level

of education to be a high school diploma or GED stayed constant at 8 percent from 2009 to 2012 (**Figure 1**).

- The percentage of parents who expected their child's highest level of education to be an occupational certificate or associate's degree rose from 8 percent in 2009 to 14 percent in 2012 (**Figure 1**).²
- Further, in both years, about 30 percent of parents expected their child's highest level of education to be a bachelor's degree and about 20 percent expected it to be a Master's degree (**Figure 1**).
- In contrast, fewer parents expected their child to complete a professional degree in 2012 (16 percent) than in 2009 (22 percent) (**Figure 1**).

FIGURE 1. Highest level of education parents expect their children to complete, by year, 2009 and 2012



Rounds to zero. Professional degree category includes those with a PhD or other doctorate-level degrees.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) Second Follow-up Public-Use Data File (NCES 2018-142).

Parent and Student Expectations of Highest Education Level

How have students' expectations for their own education changed over time?

In 2009, 2012, and 2016, students were asked to select the highest level of education they expected themselves to complete.¹ Note that by 2016, most of the cohort was out of high school and may have a better sense of their highest expected education level than when they were in high school.

- The 15 percent of students in 2009 who expected their highest level of

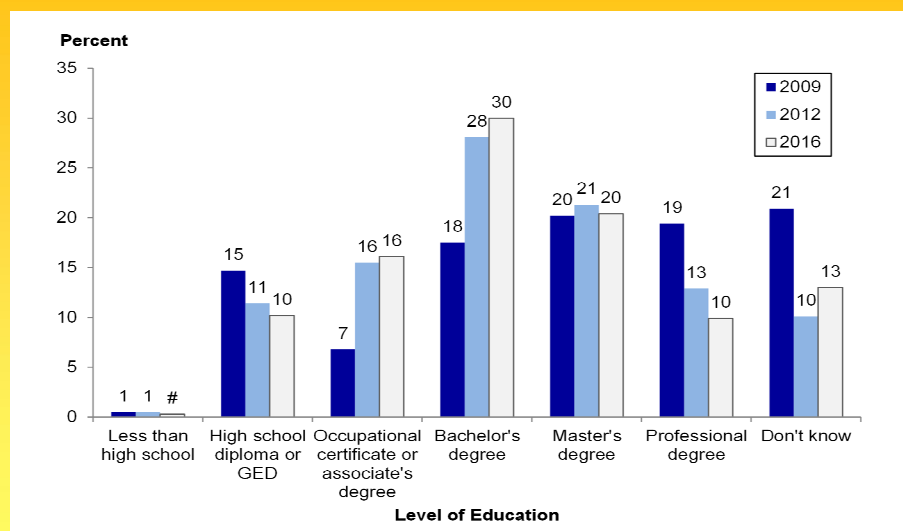
education to be a high school diploma or GED was higher than the 11 percent in 2012 and the 10 percent in 2016. **(Figure 2).**

- The proportion of students expecting to complete a postsecondary degree of any type was higher in 2012 (about 78 percent) and in 2016 (about 76 percent) than it was in 2009 (about 64 percent) **(computed from Figure 2).**
- The 16 percent of students in 2012 and the 16 percent of students in

2016 who expected their highest level of education to be an Occupational certificate or Associate's degree were each higher than the 7 percent in 2009 **(Figure 2).**

- The 28 percent of students in 2012 and the 30 percent of students in 2016 who expected their highest level of education to be a bachelor's degree were each higher than the 18 percent in 2009 **(Figure 2).**
- Over time, fewer students expected to earn a professional degree, a trend which matched parents' expectations. In 2009, 19 percent of students expected to complete a professional degree. This figure decreased to 13 percent in 2012 and to 10 percent in 2016 **(Figure 2).**
- Students were given the option to indicate that they didn't know how far they would get in school. The percentage of students who didn't know the highest level of education they expected to complete dropped from 21 percent in 2009 to 10 percent in 2012, then rose again slightly to 13 percent in 2016 **(Figure 2).**

FIGURE 2. Highest level of education students expect to complete, by year, 2009, 2012 and 2016



Rounds to zero.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) Second Follow-up Public-Use Data File* (NCES 2018-142).

Endnotes

¹If a parent answered that they expected their student to start, but not complete, a given education level, the response was grouped with those who answered that their student would complete the education level immediately below. This grouping was also used for student responses.

²Occupational certificate was not offered as a separate option on the 2009 Base Year questionnaires. Exploratory analyses were run to ensure that response options were understood by parents at each round. These analyses are explained in the footnote to table 2 in the supplementary tables posted on the NCES website: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019015>.

This NCES Data Point presents information of education topics of current interest. It was authored by Elise Covert of NCES. Estimates based on samples are subject to sampling variability. All stated differences are statistically significant at the .05 level using a two-tailed Student's *t*-test without adjustments for multiple comparisons. In the design, conduct, and

data processing of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys, efforts are made to minimize effects of nonsampling errors, such as item response, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.